

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

19 May 1953

SUBJECT: NIE-96: THAILAND'S ABILITY TO WITHSTAND COMMUNIST  
PRESSURES OR ATTACKS

THE PROBLEM

To estimate the political, economic, and armed strength of Thailand, with particular reference to Thailand's ability to withstand external or internal Communist pressures or attacks, through mid-1954.

CONCLUSIONS

1. The Viet Minh incursion into Laos will probably lead to Communist pressure on Thailand.

2. Communist pressure on Thailand during the next few months is likely to be confined to intensified political warfare and infiltration across the Laotian border. The Thai government will almost certainly be able to withstand such pressure.

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3. The economic situation in Thailand is stable and is not vulnerable to Communist exploitation. However, the political situation probably could not withstand strong Communist pressure.

4. If the Communists consolidate their position in Laos, or occupy the Shan states of Burma, the Thai government would probably capitulate to Communist pressure, unless certain of immediate and effective assistance from the US.

#### DISCUSSION

##### I. THE CURRENT SITUATION IN THAILAND

5. The effects of recent events in Indochina. Thailand's relative freedom from Communist pressure has probably been ended as a consequence of the recent Viet Minh incursion into Laos which has a common border with Thailand of about 900 miles in length. Although most of the Viet Minh troops that invaded Laos in April 1953 have apparently withdrawn northward for the present, Communist prestige and strength in Laos have been increased as a result of this invasion. Some Communist consolidation will undoubtedly take place in Laos in coming months. The Viet Minh will probably intensify subversive operations and agent infiltra-

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tions across the Thai frontier. In addition, the USSR and Communist China may, in pursuit of a long range Communist design to gain control of all Southeast Asia, seek to derive further advantage from the Laos success by subjecting Thailand to political and economic pressures.

6. The Thai Government has reacted to the Viet Minh invasion of Laos by reinforcing the army, police, and air force units in the northeastern provinces bordering Laos. The government has announced its intention to evacuate 400-500 known Viet Minh leaders and several thousand youth of military age from among the largely pre-Communist Vietnamese residing in the Thai border area. However, because of the length of the Laotian border, the size of the Vietnamese minority, and the limited strength and effectiveness of available Thai military and police forces, these measures will not completely close the border or fully secure the Thai border regions.

7. Political Strength. The political situation in Thailand is not on the whole vulnerable to Communist subversion from within. The government maintains effective control over a populace which in general gives it support. The royal family, which is a symbol of unity in Thailand, has great prestige and popularity.

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Because of a long tradition of independence, no strong anti-colonial grievances, like those in other Southeast Asian countries, exist in Thailand. Although government officials occasionally make neutralist gestures, a pro-Western sentiment apparently exists throughout the government and the public at large, and Thailand has sent troops to Korea.

8. Thailand does possess, however, political weaknesses which might become aggravated under increased Communist pressure. Continual intrigues and plots among cliques in the government on occasion lead to swift transfers of power. (At present, there is a struggle for political supremacy within Thailand's ruling military group, chiefly involving Premier Phibun Songgram, Police General Phao Sriyanon, and Army General Sarit Thamarat.) Second, Thai governments characteristically have not offered strong resistance to external pressure but have accommodated themselves to the dominant external power of the moment. Third, there are several dissident political and ethnic groups in Thailand.

9. The most important of these groups, in the light of recent events in Indochina, is a Vietnamese (largely Annamite) minority of from 75,000 to 100,000 which for the most part resides

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in five provinces of northeast Thailand bordering Laos and Cambodia. This group is in general strongly sympathetic to the Viet Minh, and supplies food, money, medicines, arms, and ammunition to the Communists in Indochina. It also provides the Viet Minh guerrillas with a safe haven and a recruiting base in Thailand.

10. There are approximately 3 million Chinese in Thailand, the majority of whom are believed to sympathize with Communist China. Among the Chinese, there is a small but vigorous Chinese Communist Party of Thailand which has about 2,000 hard-core members and perhaps as many as 100,000 supporters. The Chinese Communist Party of Thailand exerts a strong influence in the Chinese labor movement and has a moderate influence over the Chinese-language press and Chinese educational and business circles in Thailand. The Thai Communist Party is a small and ineffectual body. Both Communist parties are illegal in Thailand.

11. The most important group of Thai nationals consists of the adherents of former Premier Pridi Phanomyong. Although Pridi has been in exile from Thailand for more than five years, he appears still to have a considerable number of supporters, parti-

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cularly in the northeast, among politically-conscious Thais in government, military, business, and professional circles.

Pridi's exact whereabouts is unknown, but there is reason to believe that he may be in Communist China. The Communist leadership may have plans, which include Pridi, for a future "Thai People's Government". Such a government might be set up in Thailand or in southern Yunnan, where the Chinese Communists have recently established a "Thai Autonomous Area."

12. Economic Strength. Economic conditions in Thailand offer the Communists little to exploit. Thailand enjoys the highest standard of living in the Far East. Taxes are low. The national debt is small. The fiscal position is sound. Thailand is free from population pressure (approximately 19,000,000 people and an area slightly larger than Spain). There is relatively little unemployment, and extreme poverty is absent. The country is relatively free from the agrarian unrest associated with oppressive forms of land tenure. Thailand has a favorable balance of trade, and sells more than 70% of its exports to the US or sterling area countries. The market for rice, which is Thailand's principal export, is good and will probably remain so. The chief weakness in the Thai economic situation lies in

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uncertainty of continued good markets for its secondary exports (rubber, tin, and wolfram). Restrictive economic measures against the Chinese minority population also constitute a source of unrest.

13. Military and Police strength. Thailand's military and police forces have an estimated total strength of about 108,000. The Royal Thai Army, which shares the responsibility for defending Thailand with the National Police, numbers about 50,000. The combat effectiveness of Thai army units varies greatly, and though it remains generally low by US standards, a good deal of progress has been made under US programs of reorganization and re-equipping. The principal deficiencies of the army are: arms and equipment mainly obsolete and/or inoperable; serious shortages in ammunition, spare parts, artillery, vehicles, and signal equipment; inadequate training; inertia and involvement in internal politics on the part of senior officers. No serious problem of political unreliability is believed to exist among the rank and file of the Thai army. The extreme factionalism which exists throughout the officer corps, however, could seriously weaken Thailand in time of crisis. At the present time, the army's strength is concentrated in the Bangkok and Central Thailand area. Additional units have been ordered to the northeast to strengthen the approximately 10,000 army troops presently in the area.

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14. The Royal Thai Air Force has a personnel complement of about 10,000. It presently has 42 piston fighters and 17 transports which are combat-ready. The combat effectiveness of the RTAF is low, its chief deficiencies being: equipment shortages, low serviceability rates, a very weak communications system, and small and poorly equipped airfields. The RTAF is currently patrolling the northeast borders.

15. The Royal Thai Navy would be largely ineffective as a military force against foreign navies, even the Chinese Communist Navy. However, it could assist army and police forces in combatting internal uprisings.

16. The Thai police force of approximately 38,000 is a national force which, in addition to normal police duties, has primary responsibility for internal security, domestic intelligence, and border patrol. In time of emergency or even of invasion, the police force bears the first brunt of the attack; the army is called later only if needed. However, the police establishment is not properly a fourth branch of the armed services because it has no heavy equipment, no unit-training larger than company size, and poor mobility of units larger than patrol size. Other weaknesses of the police include:



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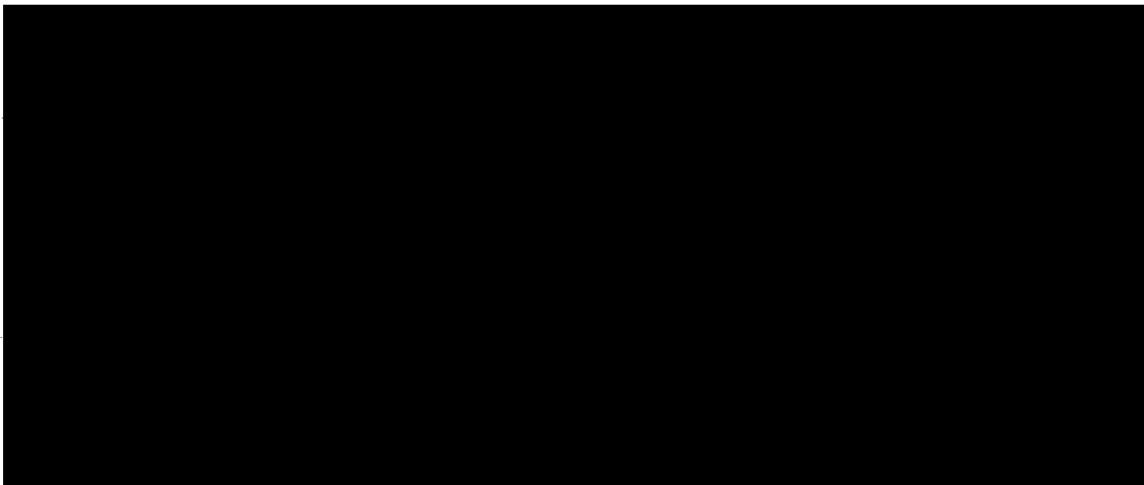
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intense rivalry with the army; inadequate coordination with  
military and civilian authorities; a poor intelligence system;

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[REDACTED] At present, several hundred  
specially trained and equipped police are augmenting the 5,000-  
6,000 police regularly assigned to the northeast, and joint police-  
army patrols have been established along the entire eastern bor-  
der, especially concentrated at the more vulnerable points  
opposite central and southern Laos.

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II. THAILAND'S ABILITY TO WITHSTAND COMMUNIST PRESSURES OR ATTACKS

18. Under present circumstances, Thailand can probably with-  
stand the kind of pressure or attack which the Communists are  
likely to direct against Thailand in the next few months, namely,  
political warfare and the infiltration of agents and guerrillas

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across the Laotian border. Although Thai police and military forces would probably not be able completely to suppress Communist infiltration and terrorist activities in the northeast, they would be able to contain such activities and to prevent the establishment within Thailand of a secure base for Communist guerrilla operations. Intensified Communist external threats and inducements would probably meet with little success. In the unlikely event that Communist-inspired strikes, sabotage, or insurrection should occur within Thailand in the near future, these activities might create considerable disruption, but would almost certainly not cause the downfall or the re-orientation of the government. A Viet Minh invasion of Thailand is unlikely during the current rainy season. Should one be undertaken, however, with the forces presently available to the Viet Minh in this region, the Thai armed forces would almost certainly be able to counter it successfully.

19. If, however, the Communists should firmly consolidate a position along Thailand's borders, as the result either of Viet Minh action in Indochina or of Chinese Communist military intervention in the Shan States of Burma, the situation would be drastically altered. In that event, the resistance Thailand would make to the Communists would depend primarily on whether

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Thailand's leaders considered that sufficient external assistance could be counted upon. Specifically, Thailand's leaders would probably be satisfied with nothing less than a US commitment to support and defend Thailand. If they were given such a commitment and were convinced that US help would be immediate and effective, we believe that most of Thailand's leaders, General Phao included, would commit the forces at their disposal to the resistance of Communist aggression.

20. If Communist power were firmly established on Thailand's borders and if it did not appear that the necessary amount of US aid would be forthcoming, political stability in Thailand would probably deteriorate rapidly, and there would be little effective resistance to Communist pressures or attacks. Thailand's leaders would probably capitulate, hoping to salvage what they could for themselves and for Thailand.

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